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Wagoner, Brady; Kadianaki, Irini

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Brady Wagoner and Irini Kadianaki

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Abstract This review examines how we can use the theoretical and methodological tools of Gillespie's book to become better social scientists. We examine ways of approaching intergroup relations by applying the ideas of the book to the context of immigrants moving to Greece. Issues of the mediation of culture in communication and understanding between people are then examined. Specifically, the paths of understanding through the use of symbolic resources are explored through the contexts of Ladakhi tourism and of immigrants in Greece. Finally, we examine the ways in which social scientists move in their understanding of social phenomena.

Key Words immigration, Mead, mediation, self-reflection, selves, symbolic resources, tourism

Brady Wagoner and Irini Kadianaki

University of Cambridge, UK

Selves on the Move

Gillespie, Alex, *Becoming Other: From Social Interaction to Self-Reflection*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age, 2006. 308 pp. ISBN: 978-1-59311-230-1 (pbk).

Becoming Other offers a clear, sophisticated and substantial presentation and development of George Herbert Mead's ideas. Though one could easily argue that Mead is the richest source for questions of self, little has been done to advance his theory in psychology. Many psychologists use Mead when they come to the question of self-reflection but all too quickly jump on the vague expression 'taking the attitude of the other towards oneself' as an explanation of the process. The quotation is taken to mean that somehow the other must get in the individual's head. Such an approach *conventionalizes* (in Bartlett's sense—Bartlett, 1932) Mead into the dominant individualist framework of psychology, and thus avoids his comments about the constitutive role of society and social interaction in the construction of self.

Gillespie is too clever to fall prey to this impoverished explanation. First of all he reinterprets Mead to be 'the philosopher of the social act', thus situating *mind in action* over *mind in thinking subject*, as adopted by the former approach. Furthermore, social acts need to be distinguished from non-social acts because action in relation to others

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elicits a response from the other. Shaking an angry fist at another person will stimulate them to respond by either withdrawing or increasing aggression, whereas the same gesture directed at the moon will cause no change in the moon. In the first case, we are concerned with *subject–subject* relations and in the latter *subject–object* relations. From this standpoint of the *social act*, *selves are not something we ‘have’, they are something we do and do in relation to others.*

In order to make full sense of this final point we need to discuss the relationship between social acts and society. Social acts occur within the structures of society, that is, *social positions* or *perspectives*. For insect societies these positions are given at birth by biology. In contrast, humans only gradually accumulate social positions in the process of development. As humans we must, in a sense, experience what it is like, from these social positions, to act towards others and be acted towards. We learn to play the parts of buyer–seller, talker–listener, teacher–learner, and so on, in reality, play or imagination. Occupying these ‘stable social positions’ allows us to take the attitude of others in social acts, because we have played that part (position) ourselves at an earlier point in time. No intellectual or mystical process is taking place here. From the position of buyer or seller I know how the other will respond to my actions because I have previously embodied that set of responses.

A person’s self is, then, a heterogeneous set of selves, which come into play in structured social activities. Through occupying different stable social positions we *differentiate* the self into these positions. This notion of self as diversity and often incongruence across social situations is examined by many voices in psychology (e.g. Harré, Hermans, etc.), yet the equally important question, ‘how do different selves form a unity?’, is left unexplored. The self is heterogeneous but it is an organized heterogeneity. Firstly, positions are horizontally paired through the ‘vocal gesture’. The same words, for example ‘five dollars’, are heard from both the buyer and seller position but the meaning differs depending on to which side of the social act one belongs: the seller hears the gesture as *asking*, while for the buyer it is a stimulus for *giving*.

Secondly, the self is integrated vertically: superordinate positions come to regulate subordinate positions. Gillespie points out how the position of ME-as-tourist can regulate ME-as-buyer: tourists feel it necessary to get a good price for an item, so as to not be seen as a ‘tourist dupe’. Actions at one level of social acts simultaneously feed into a higher level. To take another example, identification with a particular national identity position might come to regulate feelings

and actions of a 'soldier' (social position) on the battlefield. When he is feeling weak and cowardly he must simply think of his country to give him purpose and motivate him to act courageously.

Intergroup Relating

Self is composed of an organized system of positions or perspectives from which we act towards others, others act towards us, and we act towards our selves. Understanding this complexity necessitates both attending to the structures of society (i.e. stable social positions) and relating them to micro-exchanges between social agents. We are now in a position to ask what happens when two different symbolic worlds meet, where the backgrounds, roles, interests, economic, cultural and symbolic resources, and so on, of the one group are divergent from those of the other, and neither has experienced the position of the other in terms of any of these dimensions.

Gillespie's unique laboratory for investigating these questions, of self's development through strivings in a new social and material environment, is tourism in Ladakh. But we can also fruitfully apply his expanded Meadian framework to other similar contexts, such as immigration. Both tourism and immigration bring together at least two groups that must try to understand each other and make meaning of the new social reality in relation to the other, yet there are also important differences between the two. People travel for recreational reasons, dreams of self-discovery, and just to get away. Furthermore, the travel act is impermanent; one is expected to return to one's previous life, albeit transformed. In contrast, immigration is a permanent life transition and is characterized by very different motivations. Immigrants are 'pulled' by the possibility of finding economic prosperity but might also be 'pushed' out of their home country due to social or political oppression, or by international conflicts. The motivations and interests of two different groups thrown together remain largely a mystery to each other. It will be helpful at this point to explore how different groups form their positions and perspectives vis-à-vis each other. From there we proceed to outline various (mis)understandings and (mis)coordinations that result between them.

The tourist position is constructed largely from the social representations and symbolic resources of the tourist's home community. We have detailed knowledge of an environment that we have never stepped foot in before, and pre-position ourselves within this imaginary landscape. Mass-mediated images, guidebooks, films and magazines are used to construct positions in imagination, which can then be

physically embodied in the act of travel. Through these resources Ladakh is represented as an innocent and rich culture, which becomes concretized in the images of Buddhist monasteries, traditional garb, steep snowy cliffs, which all promise an adventure 'off the beaten track'.

In similar fashion, research with immigrants in Greece, conducted by the second author, showed how, before moving, immigrants had already constructed emotional and idealized representations of Greece (Kadianaki, 2006). For the 25 immigrants coming from a variety of countries (Syria, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Iraq, Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine), Greece was a step to the west, a part of the 'developed' as opposed to undeveloped world, a 'free' 'democratic' country. This image was formed through the consumption of television news, stories from family and friends who had already immigrated, and knowledge of books of and about ancient Greek history and philosophy.

When expectations meet reality both tourists and immigrants face similar ruptures. Tourists ask, 'Why aren't all Ladakhis wearing their traditional clothes? Are their cultural performances merely a show for tourists? Why are they eating meat? Are they so concerned with spiritualism?' Immigrants' idealized representations also collapse when they make contact with the new environment. Does the Greek society want us or not? Since we work hard, why aren't we legally employed? Why do they think we are dangerous and miserable, since we try so hard to succeed? In striving to become other, immigrants have exchanged the constraining gaze of their home community for that of the host community.

Recipient communities also come up against the unfamiliar in their efforts to construct a working knowledge of the other. Ladakhis see in tourism an enormous source of income that sustains them. Their position is one of relatively less symbolic power: first, because they depend on tourists for their livelihood; second, because they see themselves as moving towards modernization and development, a position tourists already hold. Despite their economic dependency on tourists, tourists confront them with many unfamiliar and inexplicable behaviours. For example, tourists want to trek up mountains, which Ladakhis see simply as obstacles; tourists visit and admire Buddhist monasteries, though they are not Buddhists; and tourists bargain with poor Ladakhis over goods even though they are rich.

Similarly, every community that accepts immigrants is faced with otherness. Greece, like many other nations, perceives immigration with suspicion and ambivalence. 'Immigrants are stealing jobs from the natives', they say; yet at the same time immigrants are utilized as cheap labour. Additionally, they are represented as being responsible for

minor or major crimes by a large part of the Greek population. And finally, to a lesser extent, they are seen as a suffering group, coming from very poor, 'third world countries', and are thus to be pitied or protected, as one would a child.

In the encounters between different groups, either tourists meeting Ladakhis, or immigrants meeting the Greek community, there are distinguishable social acts in which groups are cast more readily into certain positions. Gillespie shows how position exchange, although limited, does occur between tourists and Ladakhis. Ladakhis have travelled and tourists have worked in Ladakh, tourists have been photographed and Ladakhis have taken photographs themselves, and both have been in the position of serving and being served in their lives. But these are all rather abstract and superficial position exchanges, which allow for only general understanding of the actions of the other; at a more concrete level each finds a determined place within social acts and intersubjectivity is thus blocked.

For example, in the buying/selling act, both tourists and Ladakhis understand that money will be exchanged for an object, as both have experienced the perspective of buyer and seller before, though they misunderstand each other at another level. Tourists do what they can to avoid being 'ME-as-tourist-dupe'. In the buying act this ME translates into someone who pays the 'tourist price' for an item, which leads tourists to argue fiercely over prices. From the Ladakhi perspective the tourist's behaviour is cruel. For them, a fair price is relative to what a tourist 'can' pay. Tourists are richer than Ladakhis and thus goods should cost more for them. Because the two groups approach the same act from very different perspectives, they misconstrue the perspective of the other at the concrete level.

In Greek society immigrants are cast into the position of employee within the working act. But this particular concrete position is without the respect or influence that it might have in other circumstances. From the employer's perspective, the immigrant is simply cheap labour and the Greek public, viewing the working act from outside, represents immigrants as stealing jobs from Greek workers. The immigrant is thus left struggling to understand why their hard work is resented, when from their perspective it should be commended.

Culture, Communication and Understanding

Gillespie concludes *Becoming Other* with an overview of theories of self-reflection, yet the book explores and comments on much broader and richer phenomena than are brought together in this topic. We are

left wanting a broad theoretical integration that synthesizes the role of (symbolic) media resources in fuelling imagination, perspective through social positions, intergroup (mis)understanding, culture as a communication mediator, and so on. But perhaps this was beyond the scope of his book. Gillespie does what he promised: explains self-reflection through an analysis of social structure and the micro-dynamics of speaking. In the remaining space of the review we will attempt to develop some of the budding insights of this study for some major questions in contemporary social science.

Understanding any message—whether it be vocal, written, painted or performed—involves making sense of it from one's own position. As we have seen in the above, social positions not only locate us in a society, they are also perspectives onto the world, that is, systems of knowledge. Wagner, Duveen, Themel and Verma (1999) show how understandings of madness differ according to the position young Indians occupy. Within a position of ME-as-family-member, madness is seen as a sort of spirit possession to be dealt with by traditional healers, whereas from the position ME-as-university-student, madness becomes a chemical imbalance to be dealt with through medication and psychotherapy.

A single object may resonate with multiple interrelated positions. In Gillespie's book we see Ladakhis interpreting tourists' bargaining behaviour through the positions of ME-as-seller, ME-as-poor, ME-as-Buddhist. These positions may work in concert with one another, as a single vertical structure, resonating in union. In this act of buying, tourists are represented as 'hungry ghosts'. Buddhists conceptualize suffering as caused by desires and addiction. Hungry ghosts like tourists consume alcohol, are greedy (e.g. bargaining for cheaper goods), and move from place to place unsettled and unhappy. This analogy both makes tourists understandable and gives form to Ladakhis' resentment by positioning Ladakhis spiritually at a superior level, ME-as-poor-Buddhist in contrast to THEY-as-hungry-ghosts.

Knowledge cannot be separated from the positions and hence frameworks of knowing that we have developed into as a function of belonging to a particular society, its traditions and its positions. An inexplicable, unfamiliar message or object is made sense of through a process of finding the location for it within one's society, that is, repertoire of positions. So, for example, tourists' behaviour is explicable through Buddhism. This reminds us of the classic studies of Bartlett (1932), who exposed University of Cambridge students to a bizarre Native American ghost story, called 'War of the Ghosts'. After a delay he asked them to reproduce the story from memory. Because students

did not have the cultural framework from which the story originated (i.e. Native American society) to understand it, they had to remember it through their own society's positions. As a result the story was given form and elaborated within a framework of telling and listening to ghost stories in English society. In a recent reproduction of this study, also at the University of Cambridge, using pairs of subjects remembering together rather than individually, the second author (Wagoner, 2006) found subjects transforming the story to adhere to conventions of Hollywood ghost stories, such as *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*, in which the narrative concludes with a surprise ending of the protagonist realizing he is in fact a ghost. Culture was still mediating memory for the story but very different elements were being used to this end when compared to Bartlett's work eighty years earlier.

Paths to Understanding—through Symbolic Resources

Earlier theories of understanding, such as Wilhelm Dilthey's, included the imperative that we must transpose ourselves into the position of the source group in order to understand a message. So, for example, to read Plato we must put ourselves in the position of Plato as he was writing his philosophical dialogues. Or in the case of tourists, they would have to imaginatively embody the position of Ladakhis in order to understand them. Such a model of communication and understanding is intuitively plausible, though it has been shown by Gadamer (1975) to be philosophically problematic. We do not simply leave behind our culture in order to enter the symbolic world of another; rather our own cultural framework and resources are what enable us to make any movement towards understanding. Understanding begins with mediation through the various positions/perspectives already at our disposal. They provide a way into a strange text/action/communication. Thus, it is only our interests, prejudices (i.e. in Gadamer's sense 'pre-judgments'), traditions, and the like, that allow us to understand at all. In times of change and rupture, people draw semiotically mediated artefacts from their cultural stream, that is, symbolic resources, in order to help them understand the new social reality and redefine themselves in ways that create continuity of self (Zittoun, 2006). Gillespie has demonstrated how tourists' and Ladakhis' efforts to understand each other meet an experiential barrier, which they try to overcome through the use of symbolic resources. For example, tourists rely on guidebooks, discourses from the media and the idea of Orientalism to position Ladakhis. Ladakhis use the hungry ghost myth from Buddhism to reconstruct the perspective of the

tourists, like westerners might use a Freudian metaphor to explain the motive of men who buy expensive fast cars.

A glimpse into immigrants' symbolic resources (Kadianaki 2006) shows similarities and differences when compared to tourists and Ladakhis. The use of resources guided an intrapersonal transition to the new country, but it was also directed towards the new social context of the individual, reconstructing a past self-position in terms of meaning, identity and actions to a future self-position in Greece. Sabar's case can illustrate these uses of symbolic resources.

Sabar, a Kurd from Turkey, was condemned to 12 years in prison for being an active member of a Kurdish political formation. He escaped to Greece as a political refugee, while all his companions were put in prison and set free only a few months before our conversation. He had to quit his studies in political sciences, which he started again in a Greek university.

Although the interview guided questions about his immigration trajectory, interestingly, all his answers seemed to shape and reinforce the positions of ME-as-political-active and ME-as-Kurdish-refugee. When he left his country, he took with him some presents from his companions who were put in jail and the books from his political studies that he didn't manage to finish. After his immigration, specific activities linked to his political involvement became particularly important for him. He constructed an electronic newspaper that mostly dealt with Kurdish issues, human rights and academic topics related to politics. His favourite music (orchestral songs about the civil war in Spain and traditional Kurdish songs) and film (*Braveheart*) were used to remind him of the prosecution, to empower his beliefs and guide his actions towards changing the political reality. As he said: 'When I have problems here, I don't try to avoid them. I try to be in touch with them. I play music that will make me feel my past and the fight.'

When talking about his everyday life and his house, he said:

I think that all the things that I have in my house refer to the East or to Kurdistan. I have a picture of my grandfather who was a leader in the Kurdish lines and he was hanged without even being put on trial. A small carpet, a bag made by some villagers, pictures of my loved ones. I realize now that all these do not relate to the Greek society. They have to do with my country. You know I think that I am a distracted person because I may be walking on Greek soil but I am actually thinking of my country. I step here, I feel there.

Interestingly, while Gillespie's tourists are trying to escape themselves, to leave them behind, Sabar shows us how as an immigrant he now reinforces a pre-immigration position to give meaning to his

flight, understand his new social position and guide his actions therein. All his symbolic resources radiate with political significance and thus help him fortify and reinforce his position of politically active refugee in Greece. When talking about celebrating Kurdish National days in Greece, he says:

It is not just a social event. We have to make known to *the Greek friends* that come what is happening in Kurdistan, what *we* are celebrating, why it is important for *us*. And *we* offer *them* our hospitality for the day, the best of *our* artists, a variety of food and other things.

Sabar's case shows how politics as expressed in different symbolic resources is a way to position oneself vis-à-vis a recipient community and the community from which one has 'escaped'. He is less concerned with understanding the other as tourists are. Rather, he is interested in making the other understand him and his position.

It might be true that the temporary nature of a tourist visit invites the use of resources that can fill a cultural gap in understanding. Tourists used broad symbolic themes of Orientalism and in Ladakhis of Buddhism to facilitate an understanding of each other. On the other hand, the more permanent and differently shaped immigration invites resources that help one understand one's immigration as well as foster understanding in others. Differing motivations for migration between tourists and immigrants lead to very different orientations in where to struggle for/with understanding.

Conclusion: What Can Studying Tourism in Ladakh Teach Us About the Self?

We are all 'tourists' in our struggle to make sense of the world and its oddities. Our selves venture out into ambiguous spatial and temporal environments, which take form from the perspective of the self. As social scientists, one might say we are 'hyper-tourists', in an endless adventure out into the unknown world in search of new insights and ideas with which to develop our theoretical perspectives. What methods of travel should we adopt as social scientists? How can we come to better understand our field of travel? We have seen tourists, Ladakhis, immigrants and Greeks struggling, with more or less success, to understand their social world and place in it, through positions, traditions and symbolic resources. Social scientists must apply cultural tools as well in their own project to understand.

The failure of tourists to develop a deeper understanding of the Ladakhis, as detailed in Gillespie's book, is largely a result of the

resources they employed and their all too rigid adherence to them. So, for example, they were too concerned with being positioned as a tourist to see what motivated and interested Ladakhis within the buying act or the performing act. Understanding involves allowing oneself to be moved by new encounters. Even tourists had moments of self-reflection on their position. On arrival in Ladakh they assumed that sipping tea with locals in their kitchens, experiencing local performances and visiting isolated religious sights would lead to genuine understanding of Ladakhi people and traditions. Reflecting on one's position as a tourist problematizes this route towards understanding Ladakh, but does not provide an alternative, nor is it an example of coming to better understand the other.

There is a story of an anthropologist who, having just interviewed participants about their religion, asks, out of courtesy, if they would like to know anything about his religious beliefs. Timidly the participants point to the anthropologist's gold watch and ask him what God he worships in it. The anthropologist is taken aback, and in trying to explain it is not religious he sees himself stumble as his participants had done just before him. At such moments we become aware of our position as social scientist vis-à-vis our participants, and in so doing problematize our own techniques. We need at this point to find new pathways and tools of understanding. For example, Gillespie (p. 128) comes up against discomfort in an interview with a Ladakhi woman. He decides to give her a cassette-recorder so that she can talk about issues alone with her friends, tape the conversation and then return it to him.

Owing to the historically and culturally situated phenomena of the social sciences, as opposed to the universal and timeless phenomena of the natural sciences, no one approach to understanding will hold in all circumstances. Social scientists must in this way adapt themselves to their context, to be moved by it. Still our goal is to develop theories that go beyond the local and can be fruitfully applied to other circumstances, though always in a flexible form. In Gillespie's research the tools, content and context of self-reflection are particular to tourists; however, the general mechanism is not. Tourists are able to self-reflect on themselves as tourists because they have experienced the positions of being a tourist *and* ridiculing other tourists. These positions are particular to the historical circumstances of tourism in Ladakh. However, we can expect any act of self-reflection, whether it occurs in Ladakh, Europe, Africa or America, to have the structure of pairing previously experienced stable social positions, though these will differ depending on the society.

The movement of generalization in the social scientist must therefore be from particular cases (e.g. tourists in Ladakh) to a general model of some process, which can then be applied to other particular cases in order to develop the model. Gillespie's work, as a substantial development of Mead's ideas, is itself situated within this methodological movement. His expanded theory of self-reflection must then be used to understand other particular contexts. Indeed, Gillespie has gone onto apply his model of self-reflection to such diverse contexts as interpreting Descartes's *Meditations* (Gillespie, 2006), dissecting Malcolm X's dynamics of thought (Gillespie, 2005) and understanding how people reflectively elaborate social knowledge during the radical social changes resulting from World War II (Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling, & Zittoun, in press). The power of Gillespie's book is in its value as a tool, or symbolic resource, to *use* and develop in our own methodological and theoretical strivings as social scientists. To this end it is an essential travel companion.

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Biographies

BRADY WAGONER is completing his Ph.D. in social and developmental psychology at the University of Cambridge, with the support of the Gates Cambridge Trust and the ORS award. His main interests are in the

sociocultural study of remembering, issues of communication and understanding within a dialogical epistemology, revisiting the history of psychology (and the social sciences more generally) in search of potentially productive theories and methods, existential philosophy and the absurd pursuit of mountain summits. He is a co-creator of the *F.C. Bartlett Internet Archive* (accessed at: www-bartlett.sps.cam.ac.uk), and is editor of *Symbolic Transformations: The Mind in Movement through Culture and Society*, to be published by Routledge in 2008. ADDRESS: Brady Wagoner, SPS, University of Cambridge, Free School Lane Cambridge CB2 3RQ, UK.
[email: bw249@cam.ac.uk]

IRINI KADIANAKI is completing her Ph.D. in social and developmental psychology at the University of Cambridge, funded by Cambridge European Trusts (George and Marie Vergottis Bursary). She is working on issues of symbolic coping of immigrants moving to Greece. Her main interests involve the use of symbolic resources in life transitions, cultural-psychological issues of migration, and issues of relocation, culture and identity change in confronting otherness. ADDRESS: Irini Kadianaki, SPS, University of Cambridge, Free School Lane Cambridge CB2 3RQ, UK.
[email: eik21@cam.ac.uk]